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News Release

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Share! #Durham @BloombergDotOrg i-team tackling complex community issues. 1st challenge: increase economic opportunity for justice-involved residents

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Durham Innovation Team Now In Place

Bloomberg Philanthropies Provides \$1.2 million to Help Durham Solve Complex Community Challenges

DURHAM, N.C. – The City of Durham’s new Innovation Team (i-team) is now in place and ready to tackle critical challenges facing the community, starting with improving economic opportunities for residents who have been involved in the justice system.

In January, Bloomberg Philanthropies recognized the City as a [new member of its Innovation Teams Program](#), which helps cities solve problems in new ways to deliver better results for residents. Durham was selected from a pool of municipalities with a demonstrated commitment to creating solutions to complex problems through innovation. The City received a \$1.2 million, three-year grant from the foundation to help support the i-team, which now has four employees who will offer the City a different set of tools and techniques to innovate more effectively, and work with residents and community stakeholders to solve pressing problems.

The first challenge, identified by Mayor William V. “Bill” Bell, is to increase economic opportunity for Durham residents who are justice-involved or at high risk of justice involvement. “We want to understand the challenges that justice-involved residents face when they come home to Durham, and work with the community to identify and test ideas that will help in their transition to sustainable employment,” Bell said.

According to the North Carolina Justice Center, statewide one-in-five North Carolinians has a criminal record. In Durham each year this includes over 700 people who return home to the

community from state prison and thousands more who spend time in the Durham County Jail – this according to data from the Durham County Office of the Sheriff and the North Carolina Department of Public Safety.

“The secondary consequences of having a criminal record extend well beyond whatever time a person spends detained, on probation, or in prison, and can persist for decades,” said Innovation Team Project Manager Ryan Smith. “Upon reentry people with criminal records, even those with dismissed or misdemeanor charges, face additional barriers to finding employment, securing affordable housing, getting a college education, and obtaining a driver’s license. These barriers make it difficult for some in Durham to successfully re-integrate and share in the community’s prosperity, increasing the likelihood of recidivism.”

During the first year, the i-team will use design research and engage with justice-involved individuals to help understand their barriers to finding and keeping employment. With residents’ help, the i-team will develop solutions and prototypes to test those ideas, meaning they will be rapidly spun out on a small scale to measure and track progress against goals. Ideas that show positive results will be scaled and implemented through new public-private partnerships and City matching funds.

Throughout the design process, the i-team will look outward to Durham residents and other cities for inspiration, and fashion those insights into new approaches to improve people’s lives. The i-team will also partner with key stakeholders such as the City’s Office of Economic and Workforce Development, Durham Police Department, Durham County Criminal Justice Resource Center, North Carolina Central University Department of Criminal Justice, North Carolina Central University Juvenile Justice Institute, Duke University Sanford School for Public Policy, Center for Advanced Hindsight, community organizations, non-profits, and N.C. Representative Marcia Morey.

The City’s new i-team consists of a director, project manager, design strategist and data analyst. Strategic Initiatives Manager Josh Edwards, who leads the City’s Office of Performance and Innovation, serves as the director. Smith, who most recently served as special assistant to the dean and senior director of Innovation for the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University, serves as the project manager. Erin Parish serves as the design strategist. Parish is a cultural anthropologist with experience working with community

organizations, development organizations and peace-building initiatives in the United States, Nicaragua, Gabon, Northern Ireland and Colombia. Darin Johnson serves as the data analyst. Johnson worked in the banking industry for more than five years prior to joining the team, and also has experience with both multi-disciplinary research and an array of human-centered problem solving strategies as a graduate of the Winston-Salem State University Department of Psychology.

For more information about the City's i-team, contact Edwards at (919) 560-4111, ext. 20102 or by email at Josh.Edwards@DurhamNC.gov.

About the Budget and Management Services Department

The City of Durham [Budget and Management Services Department](#) is responsible for the development and oversight of the City's annual budget and Capital Improvement Program (CIP). The department is also responsible for performance management, continuous improvement, and strategic planning. A division of the department, the [Office of Performance and Innovation](#), serves as internal consultants, helping City departments accomplish Durham's "One Vision and Five Goals" through advancing the City's [Strategic Plan](#); providing framework for data-driven decisions; fostering a culture of innovation; and facilitating process improvements.

About the Innovation Teams Program

Now working in 24 cities across four countries, the [Innovation Teams Program](#) helps cities solve problems in new ways to deliver better results for residents. Bloomberg Philanthropies awards cities multi-year grants to create in-house innovation teams, or "i-teams," which offer cities a different set of tools and techniques to innovate more effectively and tackle critical challenges — from reducing violent crime to revitalizing neighborhoods and strengthening the growth of small businesses. Reporting to the mayor or city manager, i-teams work closely with residents and city staff to design solutions with clear goals and rigorously measure progress. By establishing i-teams, city leaders are creating the space for staff to step away from their daily work in order to rethink seemingly intractable problems, capitalize on new opportunities, reimagine outcomes, and change the culture of city hall.

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